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ECONOMIZATION OF THE SIERRA LEONE WAR

by Stephen Erbrick

In the Sierra Leone Civil War, politically and militarily counterproductive actions were commonplace and atrocities were committed against those who offered support. Despite efforts of external powers to broker peace agreements, the various factions continued fighting. This study seeks to answer why the RUF was successful despite inferior numbers and strategies anathema to modern counterinsurgency doctrines. It analyzes how war legitimizes crime and the suppression of democratic politics, adding to the growing body of research on intrastate conflict and the political economy of civil war.

Halflife
(detail)
E'lane Lemon

“We fought ten years for nothing.”

—Gibril Massaquoi, spokesman for the RUF high command

“Conflict can create war economies, often in regions controlled by rebels or warlords and linked to international trading networks; members of armed gangs can benefit from looting; and regimes can use violence to deflect opposition, reward supporters, or maintain their access to resources. Under these circumstances, ending civil wars becomes difficult. Winning may not be desirable: the point of war may be precisely the legitimacy which it confers on actions that in peacetime would be punishable as crimes.”

—David Keen, *The Economic Functions of Civil Wars*, 1998

Introduction

This report challenges the assumption that the aim of war is to win. During the Sierra Leone Civil War (SLCW), politically and militarily counterproductive actions were commonplace, enemies routinely collaborated, and atrocities were committed against the same population from which both sides should have sought support.¹ The primary question that this report will attempt to resolve is why the RUF (Revolutionary United Front) was so successful despite inferior numbers and barbarous behavior that rebuked modern counter-insurgency doctrines. In order to address my primary question, I must examine the origins of the conflict as well as the eco-

nomic, political, and military objectives of the opposing sides—the RUF and the SLA (Sierra Leone Army)—and also how they achieved their goals. Thus, I ask several subsidiary questions: what role did the initial political, social and economic conditions play in inviting the RUF intervention? Was the RUF primarily concerned with the exploitation of Sierra Leone’s alluvial diamond mines or did the RUF have real political aspirations as well? How did diamonds—of little or no value to ordinary Sierra Leoneans other than their attraction to foreigners—help finance the decade-long conflict? Even more importantly, did control of alluvial diamonds provide an incentive for the SLA and the RUF to tacitly collude to indefinitely prolong the civil war so that they could maintain their unique access to Sierra Leone’s lucrative mineral wealth? And lastly, was the presence of the alluvial diamond mines and unprotected villages a major determinant of the RUF’s and the SLA’s sordid behavior towards non-combatants?

In Sierra Leone, the civil war legitimized various kinds of crime and the suppression of democratic politics that served a multiplicity of local and individual goals. Importantly, this report examines if local and individual elements had a strong incentive to indefinitely prolong the civil war to maintain their economic and political benefits and even their lives. In support of this claim, it took a determined international force to tip the balance of power of the local interests and end the ten year long civil war.² But, what are the implications of the RUF’s success? Does the protracted and seemingly unending nature of the SLCW provide any lessons for structuring peace agreements when easily accessible natural resources are present? Many of the conditions illustrated in this report are not unique to Sierra Leone. Although Sierra Leone was especially ripe for conflict, the implications gleaned from this report may be applicable to other

states that are also suffering from brutal intrastate war that is caused and sustained by primarily economic factors and not real or perceived ethnic divisions.

Background

The Political History of Sierra Leone

Upon the death of Sierra Leone’s first prime minister in 1964, politics in the country became increasingly characterized by corruption, mismanagement and electoral violence that ultimately led to a weak and cynical civil society, the collapse of the education system and a generation of dissatisfied youth who would eventually become the RUF.³ When President Siaka Stevens entered into politics in 1968 Sierra Leone was a constitutional democracy.⁴ When he stepped down—seventeen years later—Sierra Leone was a one-party state with a lower GDP than both Somalia and Rwanda.⁵ Stevens’s rule, sometimes called “the seventeen year plague of locusts,” saw the destruction and perversion of every state institution.⁶ Parliament was undermined, judges were bribed and the treasury was bankrupted to finance personal projects that funneled millions of dollars to insiders.⁷ When Stevens failed to coopt his opponents, he often resorted to state sanctioned executions or exile. In 1985, Stevens stepped down and handed the nation’s preeminent position to Major General Joseph Momoh, a notoriously inept leader who maintained the status quo.⁸ During his seven year tenure, Momoh welcomed the spread of unchecked corruption and complete economic collapse. Unable to pay its civil servants, those desperate enough ransacked and looted government offices and property.⁹ But the government hit rock bottom when the treasury could no longer afford to pay schoolteachers and the education system collapsed.¹⁰ Because only wealthy families could afford to pay private tutors during the late 1980s, the bulk of Sierra Leone’s youth roamed the streets aimlessly. Corruption and mis-

rule by Momoh and Stevens left ordinary citizens with nothing. The most pressing issues for these citizens were (and arguably still are) basic: land, shelter and justice.

Major Actors

Revolutionary United Front (RUF)

Organized in Liberia under the guidance and leadership of both Charles Taylor and Foday Sankoh, this rebel group during the spring of 1991 intervened in Sierra Leone in an attempt to overthrow the Momoh government and sparked a gruesome ten year civil war that enveloped the entire country and left 50,000 dead.¹¹ The RUF had several objectives in addition to financing and equipping its forces, but three were most important: crippling the government's commercial and industrial activities, undermining the physical security of the state and attracting international publicity to their cause.¹² The main political goals of the RUF called were for the overthrow of the Momoh regime, the establishment of a multiparty democracy and an end to economic exploitation.¹³ Although the RUF used populist rhetoric to legitimize its initial rebellion and attract supporters, it continuously failed to articulate a coherent political agenda other than criticism that highlighted the shortcomings of the constantly changing government.¹⁴ It is conceivable that the RUF's initial rebellion was in part motivated by the shortcomings of the government of Sierra Leone (GoSL), however as the war progressed, the RUF became increasingly enamored with the cumulative benefits of Sierra Leone's profitable natural resources and not political power.¹⁵

Sierra Leone Army (SLA)

Originally a weak and rag-tag group, the SLA was largely impotent during the first year of the war.¹⁶ Within four years, however, the SLA had grown from under 4,000 to over 17,000 troops by recruiting imprisoned criminals and also by dragooning

unemployed youths.¹⁷ But it is important to note that the local civilians referred to many of these new soldiers as "sobels" or "soldiers by day, rebels by night" because of their close ties to the RUF.¹⁸ With morale low and rations even lower, many SLA soldiers discovered that they could do better by joining with the rebels in looting civilians in the countryside instead of fighting against them.¹⁹ By mid-1993, the two opposing sides became virtually indistinguishable.²⁰

Executive Outcomes (EO)

For \$1.8 million per month (financed primarily by the IMF), EO, a paramilitary group from South Africa, was paid to accomplish three goals: return the diamond mines to the government, locate and destroy the RUF's headquarters and operate a successful propaganda program that would encourage local Sierra Leoneans to support the GoSL.²¹ EO's military force consisted of 500 military advisors and 3,000 highly trained and well equipped combat ready soldiers backed by tactical air support and transport.²² Executive Outcomes employed black Angolans and Namibians from Apartheid South Africa's old 32nd Battalion, with an officer corps of white South Africans.²³ Harper's Magazine described this controversial unit as a collection of former spies, assassins and crack bush guerrillas, most of whom had served for fifteen to twenty years in South Africa's most notorious counter insurgency units.²⁴

Civil Defense Force (Kamajors)

A grassroots irregular force, the Kamajors operated invisibly in familiar territory and was a significant impediment to marauding government and RUF troops.²⁵ For displaced and unprotected Sierra Leonans, the Kamajors was a means of taking up arms to defend family and home due to the SLA's perceived incompetence and active collusion with the rebel enemy.²⁶ The Kamajors had a well-organized command

structure and its members were trained in the use of modern weaponry.²⁷ The Kamajors clashed with both government and RUF forces and was instrumental in countering government soldiers and rebels that were looting villages.²⁸ The success of the Kamajors raised calls for its expansion, and members of street gangs and deserters were also co-opted into the organization.²⁹ However, the Kamajors became corrupt and deeply involved in extortion, murder and kidnappings by the end of the conflict.³⁰

ECOMOG

The military branch of the Economic Community of West African States, this force intervened in the first days of the conflict and was most significant following the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) coup.³¹ Condemning the AFRC coup, ECOMOG forces demanded that the new junta return power peacefully to the Kabbah government or risk sanctions and increased military presence.³²

Geography and People

Sierra Leone is a small state—approximately the size of North Carolina—and lies on the West African coast.³³ It is surrounded by its larger neighbors: Guinea to the north and east, and both Liberia to the southeast and the Atlantic Ocean form its western border. Of the fourteen ethnic groups that settled in Sierra Leone, three groups—the Mende, Temne and Limba—are the numerically the largest.³⁴ Although real and imagined ethnic divisions have influenced political contests and military recruitment in the past, the SLCW was not characterized by ethnic strife.³⁵

The Demographics of RUF Recruitment

As a result of the Liberian Civil War, 80,000 refugees fled neighboring Liberia for the Sierra Leone-Liberian border.³⁶ This displaced population, composed almost entirely of children, would prove

an invaluable asset to the invading rebel armies because the refugee and detention centers, populated first by displaced Liberians and later by Sierra Leoneans, helped provide the manpower for the RUF's insurgency.³⁷ Abandoned, starving and in dire need of medical attention, the RUF took advantage of the refugees poor condition by promising food, shelter, medical care and whatever profits they gleaned from looting and mining in return for their support.³⁸ When this method of recruitment failed, as it often did for the RUF, youths were then coerced at the barrel of a gun to join the ranks. After being forced to join, many child soldiers learned that the complete lack of law—as a result of the civil war—provided a unique opportunity for self-empowerment through violence and thus continued to support the rebel cause.³⁹

But the most important reason why the civil war should not be entirely attributed to conflict over the economic benefits incurred from the alluvial diamond mines is that the pre-war frustrations and grievances did not just concern that of the diamond sector.

Diamonds – The Natural Resource Curse

The Eastern and Southern districts in Sierra Leone, most notably the Kono and the Koido districts, are rich in alluvial diamonds, and more importantly, are easily accessible by anyone with a shovel, sieve, and transport.⁴⁰ Since their discovery in the early 1930s, diamonds have been critical in financing the continuing pattern of corruption and personal aggrandizement at the expense of needed public services, institutions and infrastructure.⁴¹ The pres-

ence of diamonds in Sierra Leone invited and fed the civil war in several important ways. First, the highly unequal benefits incurred from diamond mining made ordinary Sierra Leoneans frustrated. For instance, the National Diamond Mining Corporation (NDMC)—DeBeer's venture during the Steven's government—was used to fund luxurious personal construction projects and extravagant salaries for government elites.⁴² With the RUF incursion, the formal diamond mining industry collapsed; government sponsored diamond exports declined significantly during the civil war while Liberia, a state with very few diamond reserves, exported more than \$2 billion worth of diamonds to Belgium.⁴³ This figure suggests that the profits garnered from the diamond trade with Liberia and other international clients were instrumental in financing both the RUF's and even Charles Taylor's war efforts in

neighboring Liberia.

The RUF used funds harvested from the alluvial diamond mines to purchase weapons and ammunition from neighboring Guinea, Liberia and even SLA soldiers.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the lack of external support made the control of the alluvial diamond mines that much more important. Most significantly, the presence of easily extractable diamonds provided an incentive for violence. To maintain control of important mining districts like Kono,

thousands of civilians were expelled and kept away from these important economic centers.⁴⁵

Although diamonds were a significant motivating and sustaining factor, there were other means of profiting from the civil war. For instance, gold mining was prominent in some regions.⁴⁶ Even more common was cash crop farming through the use of forced labor.⁴⁷ Looting during the Sierra Leone Civil War was not limited to diamonds, but also included that of currency, household items, food, livestock, cars, and international aid shipments.⁴⁸ For Sierra Leoneans who lacked access to arable land, joining the rebel cause was an opportunity to seize property through the use of deadly force. But the most important reason why the civil war should not be entirely attributed to conflict over the economic benefits incurred from the alluvial diamond mines is that the pre-war frustrations and grievances did not just concern that of the diamond sector. Contrary to some notable political economists, the root cause of SLCW was poor governance, poverty, and corruption, and the failure to create institutions that protected the freedoms of individual citizens.⁴⁹

The Sierra Leone Civil War (March 23, 1991 to January 11, 2002)

On March 23, 1991, The RUF, with support from the special forces of Charles Taylor's revolutionary army, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), invaded Eastern Sierra Leone.⁵⁰ As the armies moved towards the interior of the country they looted, raped, and murdered innocent civilians causing a massive refugee movement into the neighboring countries of Liberia and Guinea.⁵¹ The village of Koindo was a key target for the rebels during the initial incursion because it was an important staging point for smuggling between Sierra Leone and Liberia.⁵²

The initial rebellion could have easily been quelled in the first half of 1991.⁵³ But



African Cheetah, Linh Do

the RUF—despite being both numerically inferior and extremely brutal against civilians—controlled two-thirds of Sierra Leone by the year's end.⁵⁴ The SLA's equally poor behavior made this outcome possible. Often afraid to directly confront or unable to locate the elusive RUF, government soldiers were brutal and indiscriminate in their search for rebels or sympathizers among the civilian population.⁵⁵ After retaking captured towns, the SLA would perform a “mopping up” operation in which the townspeople were transported to concentration camp styled “strategic hamlets” far from their homes in Eastern and Southern Sierra Leone under the pretense of separating the population from the insurgents. However in many cases, this was followed by much looting and theft after the people were evacuated. This inevitably led to the alienation of many civilians and pushed some Sierra Leoneans to join the rebel cause. For these reasons, civilians increasingly relied on the Kamajors for their protection.

Within one year of fighting the RUF offensive had stalled, but it still remained in control of large territories in Eastern and Southern Sierra Leone, leaving many villages unprotected while also disrupting food and government diamond production.⁵⁶ Soon the government was unable to pay both its civil servants and the SLA.⁵⁷ As a result, the Momoh regime lost all remaining credibility and a group of disgruntled junior officers led by Captain Valentine Strasser overthrew the government on April 29, 1992.⁵⁸ Strasser justified the coup and the establishment of the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) by referencing the corrupt Momoh regime and its inability to resuscitate the economy, provide for the people of Sierra Leone and repel the rebel invaders.⁵⁹ The NPRC's coup was largely popular because it promised to bring peace to Sierra Leone.⁶⁰ But the NPRC's promise would prove to be short-lived.

In March of 1993, with much help from ECOMOG troops provided by Nigeria, the SLA recaptured the Koidu and Kono diamond districts and pushed the RUF to the Sierra Leone-Liberia border. The RUF was facing supply problems as the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO) gains inside Liberia were restricting Charles Taylor's NPFL's ability to trade with the RUF.⁶¹ By the end of 1993, many observers thought that the war would soon be over because for the first time, the SLA was able to establish itself in the Eastern and the Southern mining districts.⁶²

However, with senior government officials neglectful of the poor conditions faced by SLA soldiers, front line soldiers became resentful and began helping themselves to Sierra Leone's rich natural resources. This included alluvial diamonds as well as looting and "sell game," a tactic in which government forces would withdraw from a town but not before leaving arms and ammunition for the roving rebels in return for cash.⁶³ Abraham suggests that both sides not only had an interest in looting for personal enrichment, but also had a reason to collude so that the strained RUF could remain a formidable fighting force, prolonging the war to the benefit of both parties. Renegade SLA soldiers even clashed with Kamajor units on a number of occasions when Kamajors intervened to halt looting and mining.⁶⁴ Furthermore, an end to the fighting would have made elections a certainty, ending the benefits that the NPRC military elites gained from holding office.⁶⁵ Instead of working towards ending the war, SLA soldiers and NPRC elites appeared to be acting to prolong it.⁶⁶ The war dragged on as a low intensity conflict until January of 1995 when RUF forces and dissident SLA elements seized the Sierronco and Sierra Rutile diamond mines in the South West, furthering the government's economic struggles and enabling a renewed RUF advance on the

capital at Freetown.⁶⁷

In March 1995, the South African mercenary group EO arrived in Sierra Leone when the RUF was within twenty miles of Freetown.⁶⁸ As a military force, EO was extremely skilled and conducted a highly successful counter insurgency against the RUF. In just seven months, EO, with support from loyal SLA and the Kamajors battalions, recaptured the diamond mining districts and the Kangari Hills, a major RUF stronghold.⁶⁹ A second offensive captured the provincial capital and the largest city in Sierra Leone and destroyed the RUF's main base of operations near Bo, finally forcing the RUF to admit defeat and sign the Abidjan Peace Accord.⁷⁰ The hiring of EO seems to demonstrate that some elements within the National Provisional Ruling Council still wanted to repel the RUF invasion. Another explanation is that the NPRC simply desired to protect the capital (and themselves) while regaining control of the profitable mining districts. In short, the efforts of EO forced Sankoh to cut his losses and enter into a ceasefire and peace process. This period of relative peace also allowed the country to hold elections during which the military junta handed power over to the democratically elected President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah in March of 1996.⁷¹

The Abidjan Peace Agreement was signed on November 30, 1996.⁷² Abidjan mandated that EO was to pull out in five weeks after the arrival of a neutral peace-keeping force. However, it soon became clear Sankoh and other hardline elements within the RUF did not want peace. The main stumbling block that prevented Sankoh from signing the agreement sooner was the number and type of peacekeepers that were to monitor the ceasefire.⁷³ Had the RUF leadership legitimately wanted to end the conflict, they would have requested more, not fewer, peacekeepers. Despite the RUF's loss of strongholds in the Kangari hills and Kailahun districts

and widespread food and ammunition shortages, many rebels still did not surrender because they were extremely fearful of retribution from the now ruling Kabbah regime and the Kamajor. In January of 1997, the new democratically elected government of Sierra Leone—beset by demands to reduce expenditures by the IMF—ordered Executive Outcomes (EO) to leave the country, even though a neutral monitoring force had yet to arrive.⁷⁴ The embryonic peace process began to collapse almost as soon as Abidjan was signed because of renewed Kamajor attacks and the fear of punitive tribunals following demobilization kept many rebels in the bush despite their dire situation.

On March 25, 1997, a group of disgruntled SLA officers freed and armed 600 prisoners from the Pademba Road prison in Freetown.⁷⁵ One of the prisoners, Major Johnny Paul Koroma, emerged as the leader of the coup and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC)—the new GoSL.⁷⁶ After blessing from the captured and imprisoned Foday Sankoh, RUF fighters—who were supposedly on their last legs—were ordered out of the bush to participate in the coup.⁷⁷ Without hesitation and encountering only light resistance from SLA loyalists, 5,000 rag-tag rebel fighters marched one hundred miles and overran the capital.⁷⁸ Without fear or reluctance, RUF and SLA dissidents then proceeded to parade peacefully together. In short, the coup had been planned in conjunction with the RUF leadership.⁷⁹ Koroma then invited Sankoh to join his government, and appointed him Deputy Chairman of Mining after appealing to Nigeria (where he was imprisoned) for his release.⁸⁰ The joint AFRC/RUF leadership then proclaimed that the war had been won, and a great wave of looting and reprisals against civilians in Freetown under the auspice of: 'Operation Pay Yourself' followed.⁸¹ President Kabbah, surrounded only by his bodyguards, left by helicopter

for exile in nearby Guinea.

Condemning the AFRC coup, ECOMOG forces demanded that the new junta return power peacefully to the Kabbah government or risk sanctions and increased military presence.⁸² Starting at the Lungi airport, ECOMOG forces formed a three-pronged attack that surrounded the capital of Freetown.⁸³ Overcoming en-

Lome Peace Agreement was not particularly popular with the people of Sierra Leone because Sankoh, the commander of the unimaginably brutal and treasonous RUF, was now handed the second most powerful position in the country and even more importantly, control over all of Sierra Leone's lucrative diamond mines.

Following the Lome Peace Agreement,

The Sierra Leone Civil War was the result of decades of state neglect and exploitation.

trenched AFRC positions, the ECOMOG forces retook the capital and reinstated the Kabbah government but let the rebels flee without further harassment.⁸⁴ However, the regions lying just beyond Freetown proved much more difficult to pacify.⁸⁵ In summation, ECOMOG's intervention in Sierra Leone brought a tentative peace that also reestablished the Kabbah regime through negotiated talks with the RUF/AFRC rebels.⁸⁶ Unable to push the AFRC/RUF rebels from South and Eastern Sierra Leone, the Kabbah regime was forced to make serious concessions in the coming year.

Given that Nigeria was due to recall its ECOMOG forces without achieving a tactical victory over the RUF, the international community intervened diplomatically to promote negotiations between the RUF/AFRC rebels and the newly reinstated Kabbah regime.⁸⁷ The Lome Peace Agreement, signed on July 7, 1999 is controversial in that Sankoh was pardoned for treason, granted official status at the Vice President, and made chairman of the commission that oversaw the entirety of Sierra Leone's diamond mines.⁸⁸ In return, the RUF was ordered to demobilize and disarm its armies through a process of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration.⁸⁹ The

several renegade elements within the RUF, like the "West Side Boys," would require not only a 17,500 man UN intervention but also a British intervention to finally tip the balance of power and end the war decisively on January 11, 2002.⁹⁰ By most estimates, over 50,000 people lost their lives in the Sierra Leone Civil War.⁹¹ Countless more fell victim to the reprehensible and perverse behavior of the combatants. That May, hundreds of thousands of Sierra Leoneans reelected President Kabbah, and the RUF failed to gain a single seat in parliament.⁹² A victor was never proclaimed, and it is evident that all parties involved in the Sierra Leone Civil War had gained little in the end.

Analysis

Patrimonial System of Rule

The Sierra Leone Civil War was the result of decades of state neglect and exploitation. To better understand the civil war, it is paramount to remember the decades of political collapse that enabled a dysfunctional state system to perpetuate a patrimonial system of rule. In Sierra Leone, patron-client relationships have extended well past the time of colonial rule and have become commonplace in the modern political system.⁹³ This system of entrenched

patron-client relationships allowed the GoSL to exclude almost all of society from any tangible economic development or political representation.⁹⁴ In societies that are organized along patron-client lines, the state still extracts and distributes resources, however the extraction and distribution is privatized and therefore the interests of the society suffer immensely at the hands of small but powerful individual and group interests.⁹⁵ In political systems that are typified by entrenched patron-client relationships, politics becomes a business because political power controls the distribution of economic resources.⁹⁶ Thus, politics becomes economics. Consequently, life during the SLCW became a competition for the distribution of already scarce resources and had disastrous consequences.⁹⁷

A history typified by underdevelopment, single party rule, and widespread corruption generated a yearning for revolutionary change—especially amongst the youth of Sierra Leone.⁹⁸ Anger at the existing political system was pervasive, and many youths concluded that the unfair system of exploitation justified their often violent attempts at obtaining prosperity. But most importantly, this great divide between the "haves" and the "have-nots" of Sierra Leone made the country particularly receptive to the RUF's 1991 invasion.⁹⁹ The RUF's initial rebellion was an attempt to address the grievances of those at the bottom of a political system that failed to provide even basic state services. It was only in this environment of utter state collapse that such levels of sustained violence could be maintained.

The Economization of the Sierra Leone Civil War

While political rationality is difficult to find in the rebels' and the government's often counterproductive tactics, some semblance of economic rationality was more evident throughout the conflict. If one

takes a narrow conception of rationality as pursuing one's interests by the most efficient means possible, then making money at the expense of unarmed civilians while avoiding open confrontation with other armed groups becomes perfectly rational. This does not mean that the rebels or government dissidents were primarily motivated by greed instead of grievance. Grievances stemming from Sierra Leone's low level of development—e.g. perpetual poverty, poor healthcare and non-existent education system—invited and sustained the RUF invasion. Thus, one of the RUF's motivat-

the conflict indefinitely so that they could extend their presence in these remote areas. The RUF, and the SLA to a lesser extent, relied heavily on mining and looting to sustain their operations.¹⁰² Through the illegal diamond trade with neighboring Liberia, the RUF generated \$75 million annually which was then used to purchase arms, ammunition and equipment.¹⁰³ In a weak state like Sierra Leone, control of the political center was not necessarily the most efficient means of achieving wealth and power. For the impoverished and under-educated youth that constituted the

independent operations. This fragmentation was such that some rebels had little or no connection to that of Sankoh's RUF, as demonstrated by the renegade elements within the RUF that were reluctant to demobilize following Lome even when Sankoh was awarded the Vice Presidency and control of the country's alluvial diamond mines. Both the RUF and the SLA fragmented once in contact with the rich alluvial diamond mines. These rogue elements within the RUF, like that of the "West Side Boys," even fought against RUF forces during the late 1990s.¹⁰⁷

In our perverse world, civilians are sometimes feared simply because they are representative of some unknown and therefore possibly dangerous element.

ing factors in intervening in Sierra Leone was the desire to overthrow the neglectful, authoritarian and self-interested Momoh regime. But Sierra Leone's rich natural resources and easily lootable commodities also invited the RUF invasion and prolonged the conflict.

Protracted Nature of Conflict

Although reformist or revenge based motivations motivated the rebel invasion to some extent, the attainment of the alluvial diamonds mines and material resources from looting and theft increasingly became the overarching motivation for prolonging the insurgency.¹⁰⁰ This does not mean that the rebel forces did not wish to overthrow the government, but rather that the rebel factions wanted to gain political control as a means of maintaining their access to the vital economic resources.¹⁰¹ The alluvial diamond mines and raids on villages were very real means of economic advancement for both sides in the civil war and were powerful incentives to prolong

RUF, the alluvial diamonds mines were an easy means of improving one's well-being. For the RUF, warfare for expropriation became its *raison d'être*. It is conceivable that if the RUF failed to maintain control of the alluvial diamond mines or refrained from theft and robbery, then the conflict would have likely fizzled out by the end of the year given forceful government opposition.¹⁰⁴

Fragmentation of Warring Parties

In other intrastate conflicts that did not involve a wealth of natural resources, only a small number of warring parties openly confront each other because only a few groups are capable of financing the war effort.¹⁰⁵ But the SLCW is different from other intrastate conflicts in that the opposing factions were fragmented and numerous.¹⁰⁶ In Sierra Leone, the rich benefits that could be reaped from the alluvial diamond fields and unprotected villages, towns and cities enabled numerous actors to emerge because they could finance their

Brutalization of Civilizations

The economic opportunities provided by the civil war coupled with the fragmentation in the chain of command allowed groups on both sides to brutalize citizens with little recourse.¹⁰⁸ During the SLCW, low ranking SLA and RUF soldiers committed violent atrocities against non-combatants, because they did not have to fight for the support of the local population when the economic benefits derived from mining and looting increasingly replaced their desire for political control.¹⁰⁹ But even when political control was desired as in the case of RUF elites like Sankoh, the profits earned from the diamond trade could be used to achieve political office through bribery or violent insurrection. Furthermore, the SLA could loot and pillage because it could rely on external powers like ECOMOG, UNAMSIL, or the British to protect the political center. With actors on both sides less reliant on the civilian population for support because of profits earned from the diamond trade, the belligerents' main rationale from refraining from egregious acts of violence was essentially marginalized. Moreover, as the civil war progressed, groups from both sides increasingly recruited criminals and derelicts to join their respective ranks.¹¹⁰ This, coupled with independent factions that were able to operate free of the cen-

tralized chain of command, led to abuses against civilians during the SLCW that were high relative to counter counterinsurgency doctrine.

But both economic and political motivations are sometimes inadequate justifications for the RUF's and the SLA's simply barbaric and unnecessary level of violence. According to Human Rights Watch, 7,635 corpses were buried as a result of the January 1999 incursion into Freetown.¹¹¹ Keen suggests that the APCR/RUF rebels feared civilians and their militias because they stood beyond the system of collusion and therefore posed a substantial threat to their security.¹¹² By passing or harboring important information, civilians can hurt or betray, particularly because civilian women and children are not usually suspected. In our perverse world, civilians are sometimes feared simply because they are representative of some unknown and therefore possibly dangerous element. The ever increasing effectiveness of the CDFs Kamajors also added to the RUF's fear of the civilian population. Given that the Kamajors could not easily be targeted, indiscriminate and gruesome attacks against civilians became common as the Kamajors grew in strength.

Conclusions and Implications

All in all, access to Sierra Leone's rich natural and material resources—the alluvial diamond mines and unprotected villages—enabled both sides to finance a war that was increasing fought for economic motivations. The great wealth reaped from the vital economic centers had three primary effects. First, it enabled the fragmentation of both sides, because the individual detachments could break away from their former leadership and still fund their military campaigns with the income that they generated from mining and looting. Additionally, the diamond mines and material goods gained from theft were often used for personal enrichment thus reinforcing



A Tinge of Summer, Lihn Do

the economic motivation to continue the insurgency. Sadly, the fragmentation of the warring parties and economic benefits gained from criminal and extractive efforts facilitated the brutalization of the civilian population because the lower ranks within the warring parties increasingly lost interest in political control. When the primary motivation of sustaining the war is the extraction of resources for personal enrichment, then it is more likely that both sides would be less inhibited to commit atrocities against civilians.¹¹³ Coupled with an increasing number of criminals and thugs that constituted the armies of both sides, the civil war took a barbaric turn. When civil war is no longer framed as a political contest for control of the state, but instead devolves into an economic contest between individual, local and foreign elements, then it can be assumed that the manner in which the civil war will be fought will

differ greatly from other intrastate conflict in which economic motivations play little role.

Although the focus of this report has concerned itself with only the SLCW, this analysis has similar implications for other cases in which the actors have access to valuable natural resources and real and imagined ethnic divisions are negligible. Importantly, these findings may improve our understanding of how to prevent civil war and also how to resolve them successfully. But even more importantly, if the actors in the Sierra Leone Civil War had access to economic and political advancement through other means than just civil war, then the existing conditions that invited the invasion would largely be marginalized and thus there would be little reason for conflict.